

A grayscale photograph of three young children, likely of African descent, smiling broadly at the camera. They are positioned in the upper half of the frame. The child on the left is wearing a dark sweater, the middle child is wearing a striped shirt, and the child on the right is wearing a patterned shirt. The background is slightly blurred, showing some foliage.

# INVESTIGATING L1 - L2 READING SKILLS TRANSFER

*Amy Jo Dowd, Senior Director, Education Research*

*Lauren Pisani, Senior Specialist, Education Research*

# Hypotheses about Cross Linguistic Transfer

- **Contrastive hypothesis:** the degree of similarity/divergence between L1 and L2 mediates transfer of skills (Lado, 1964)
- **Interdependence hypothesis:** skills learned in both languages mutually feed each other (Cummins, 1979)
  - **Threshold hypothesis:** a child must reach a certain degree of proficiency in one language before transferring those skills to the other.



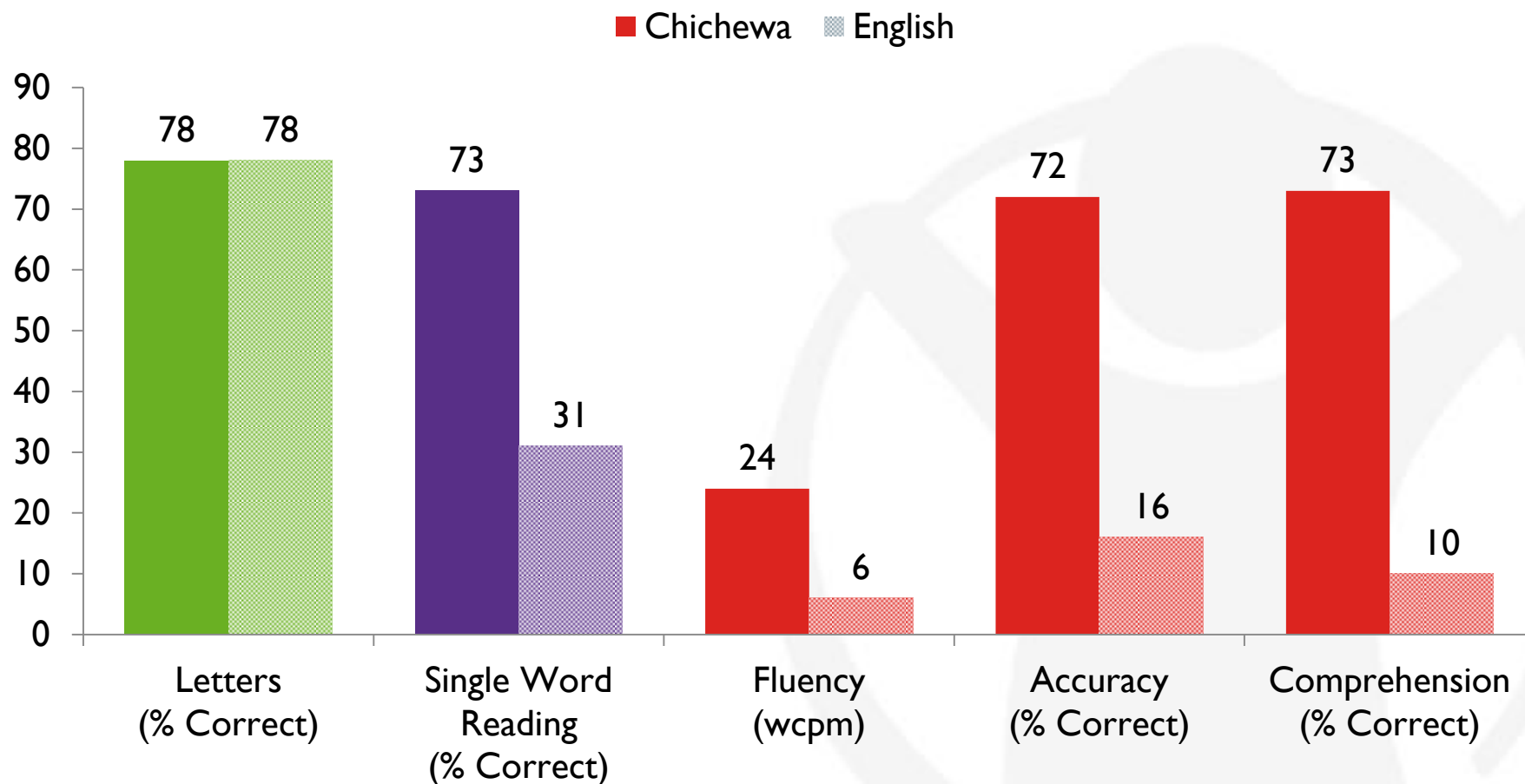
# Samples

country	grade	L1: first language	L2: second language	N students	N schools	L1 % readers
Bangladesh	3	Bangla	English	639	34	75%
Guatemala	3	K'iche'	Spanish	274	14	46%
Pakistan	2	Pashto	Urdu	243	15	20%
Philippines	3	Filipino	English	283	1: 14 sections	29%
Malawi	3	Chichewa	English	600	30	79%
South Africa	2	Sesotho	English	240	14	81%
Zambia	3	Bemba	English	383	24	1%
Zimbabwe	3	Shona	English	200	10	53%

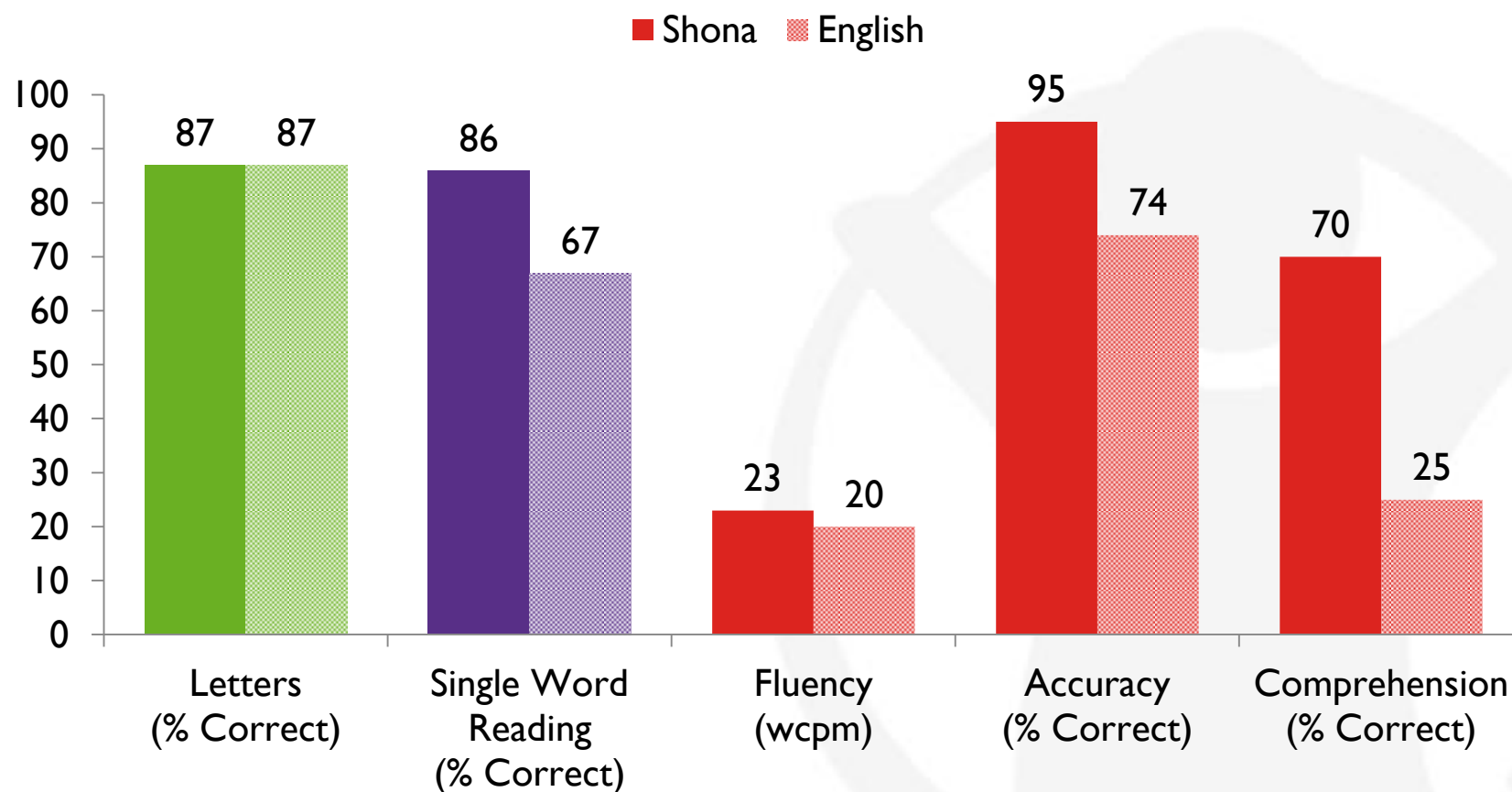
# Reading skills data

Reading Skill	Description
Alphabet knowledge	Percent of letters/sounds known
Single Word Reading	Percent of single words read correctly of 20
Fluency	Number of words in a grade-level connected text read aloud correctly in a minute
Accuracy	Percentage of words in a grade-level connected text read correctly (untimed)
Reading Comprehension	Number of comprehension questions answered correctly after reading a grade-level text aloud

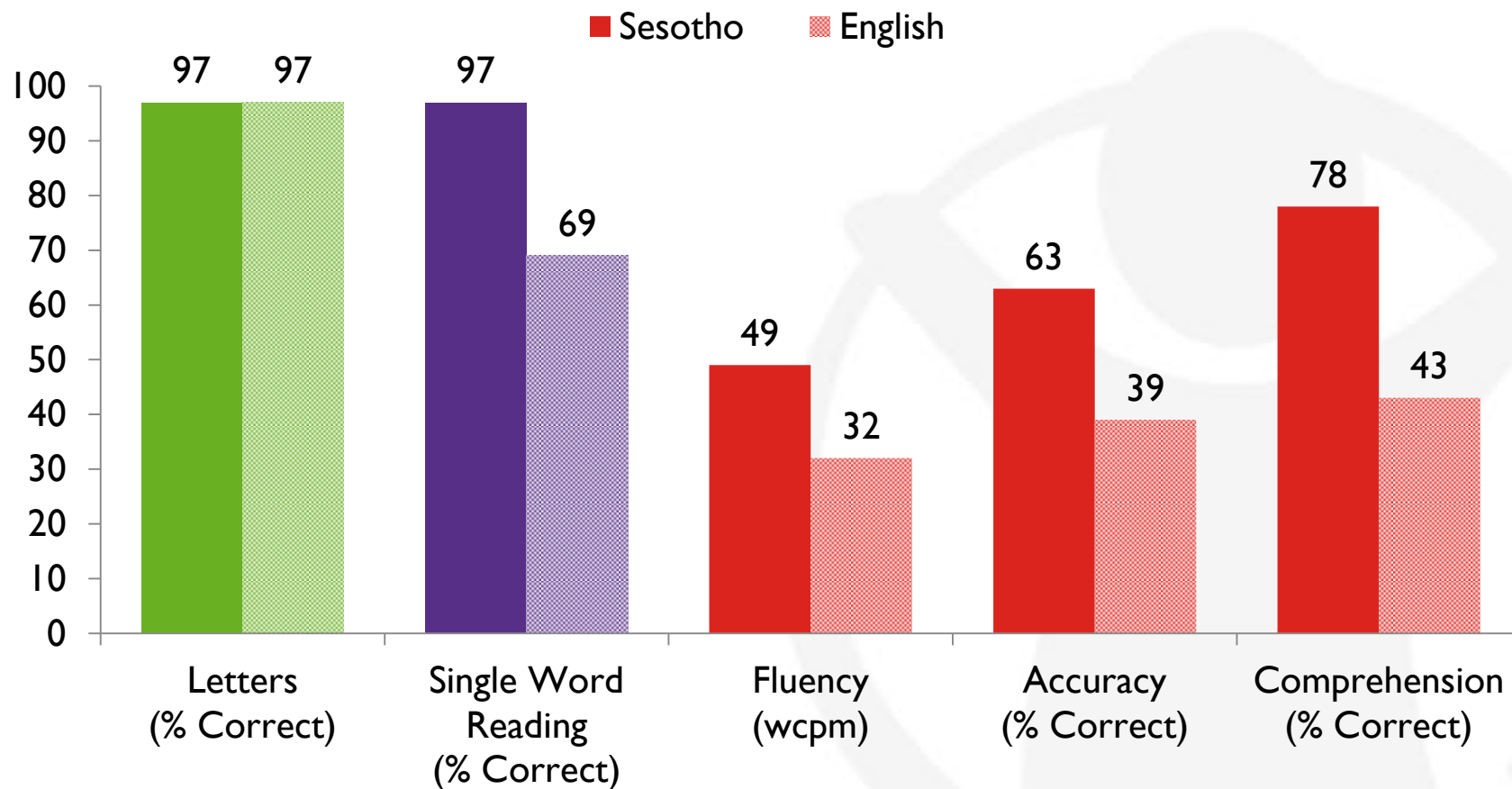
# Malawi: L1 and L2 skill profile



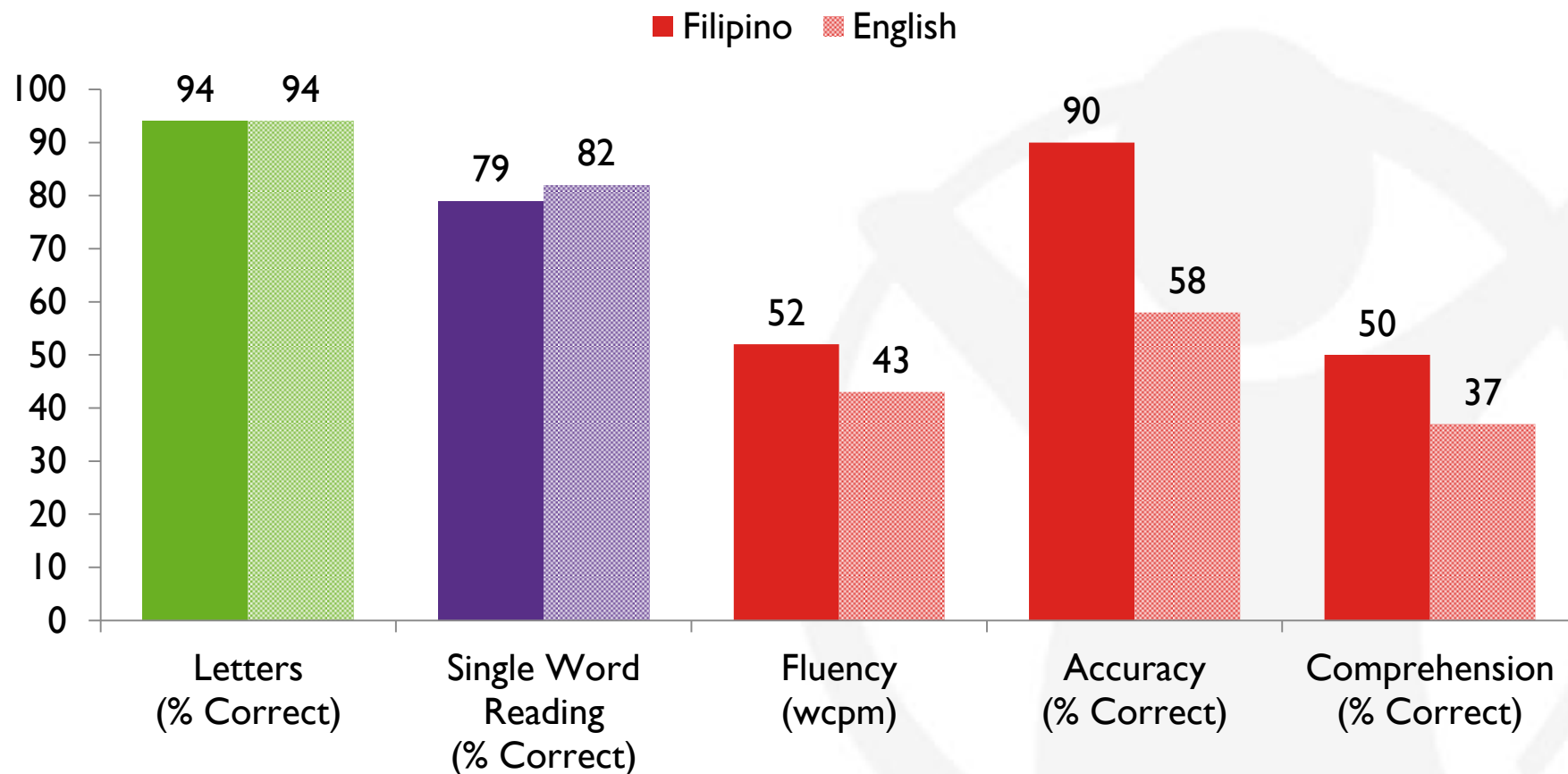
# Zimbabwe: L1 and L2 skill profiles



# South Africa: L1 and L2 skills profiles



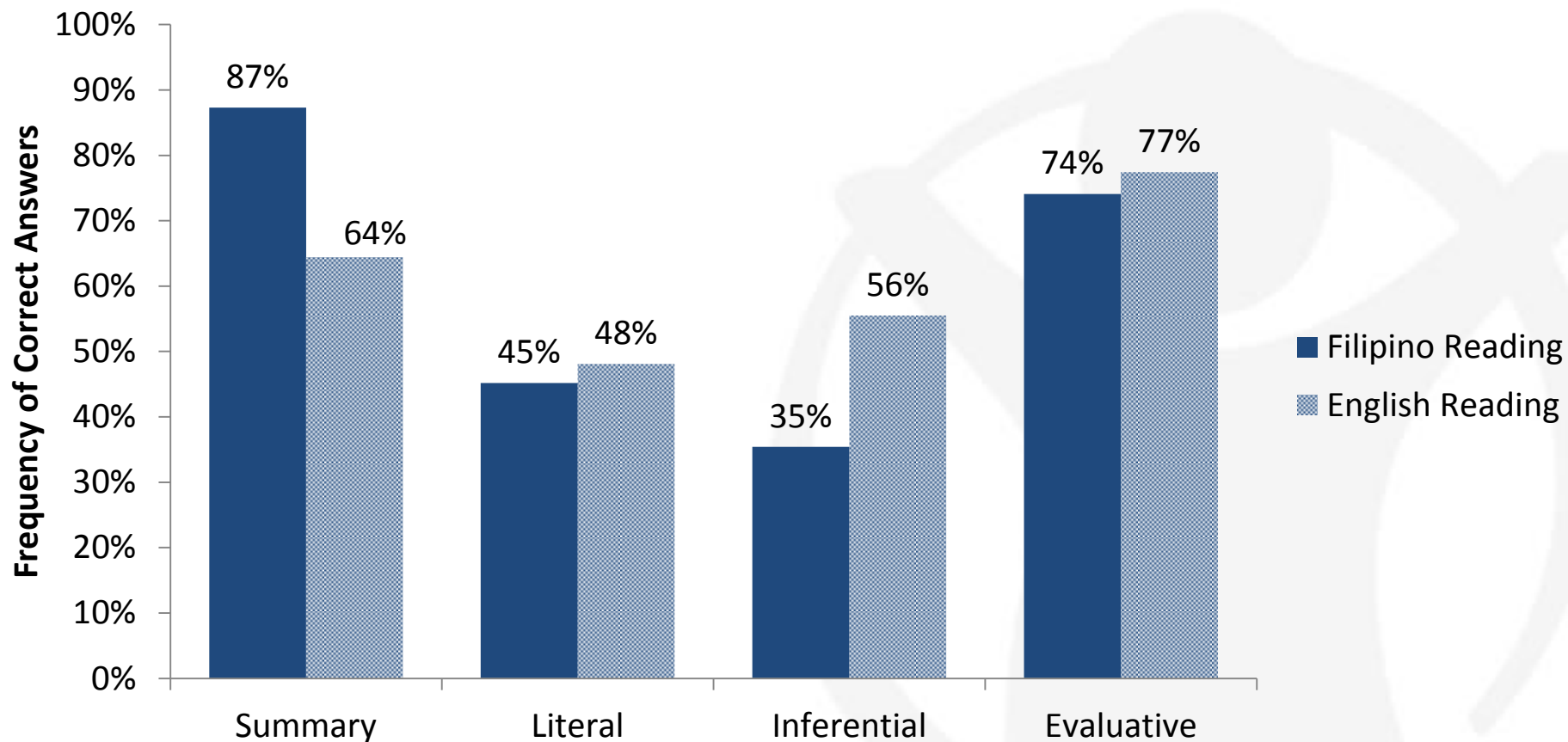
# Philippines: L1 and L2 skill profile



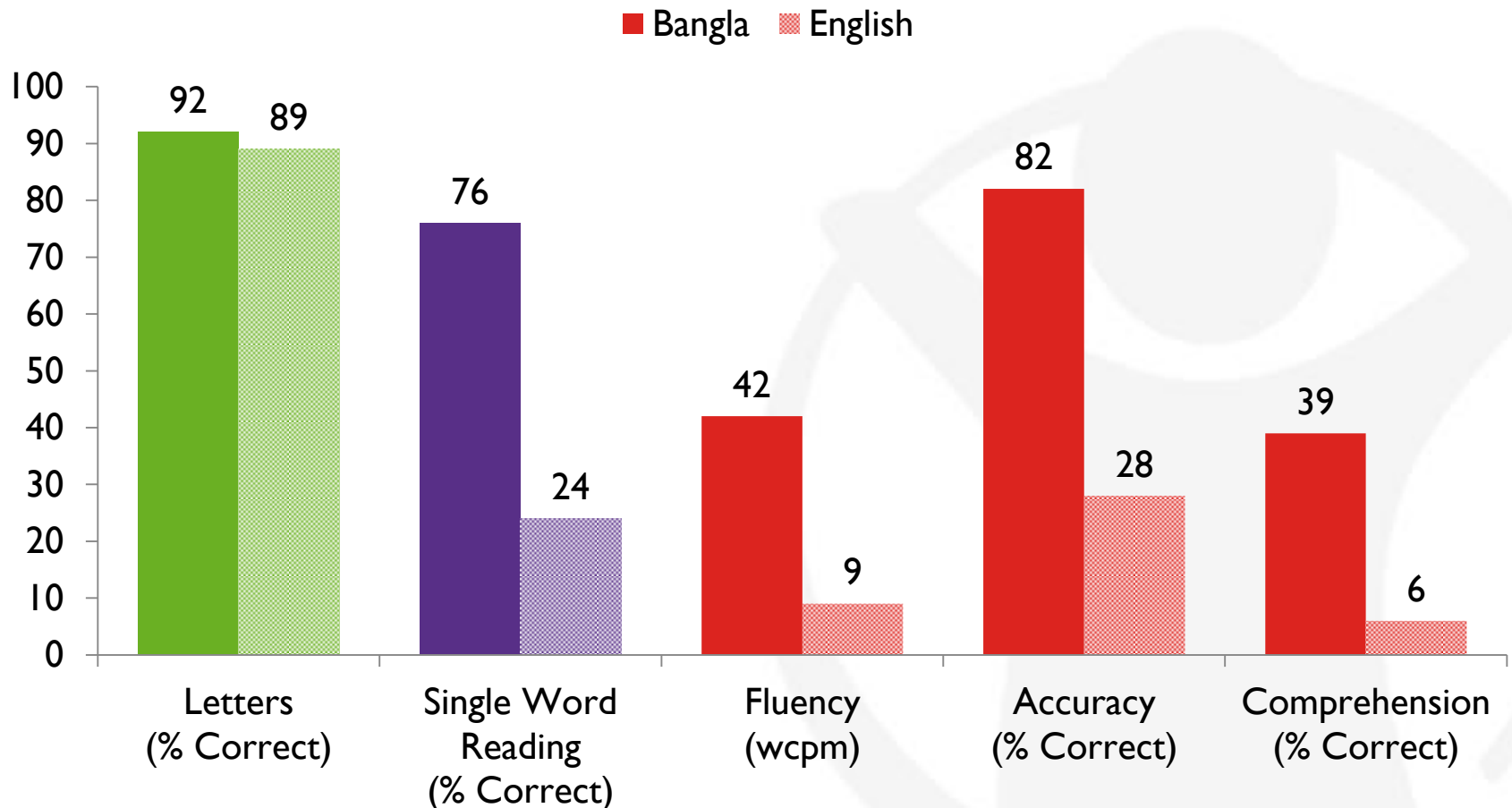


# Philippines: Reading Comprehension

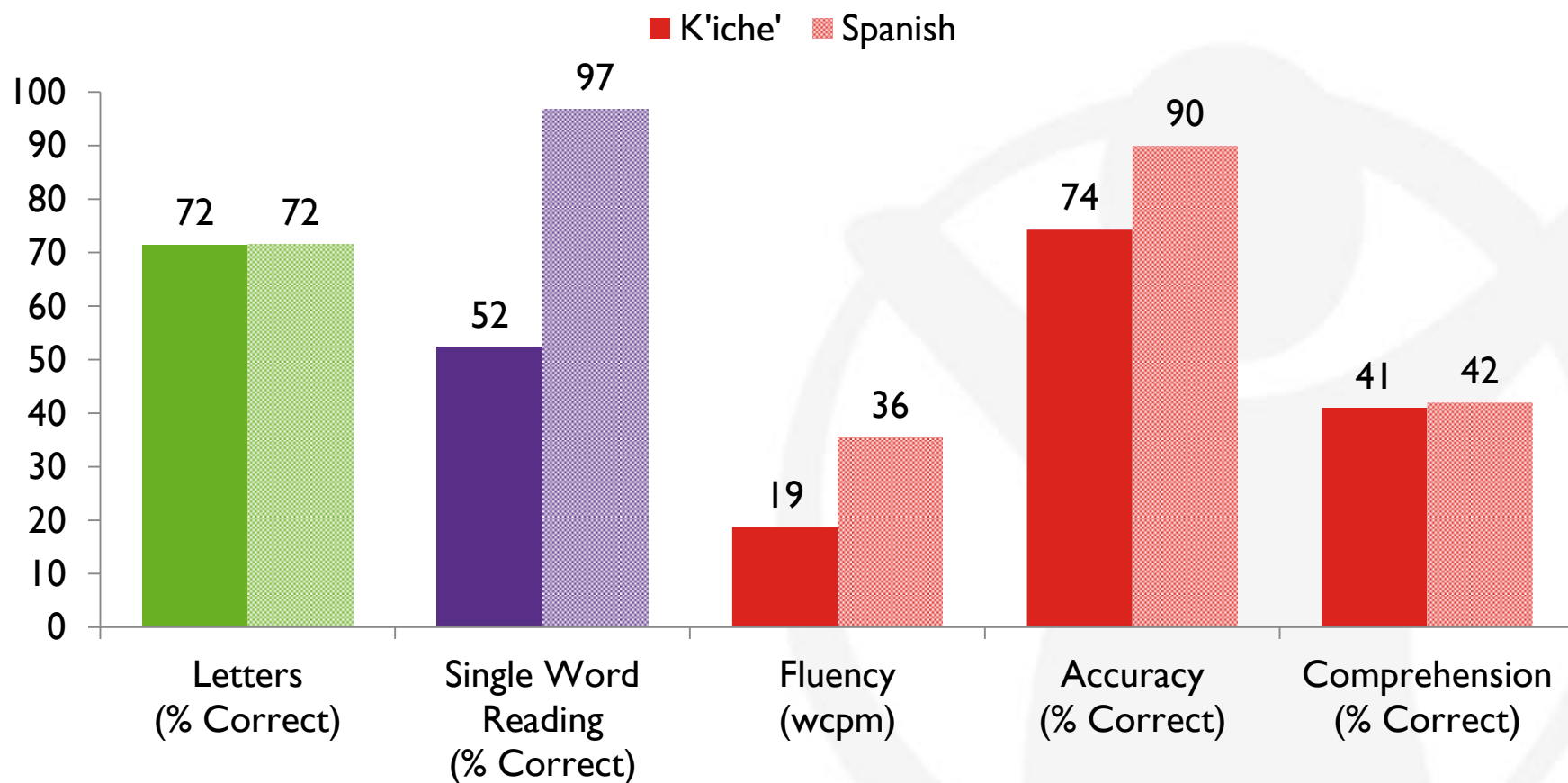
Grade 2 Comprehension by Type and Language



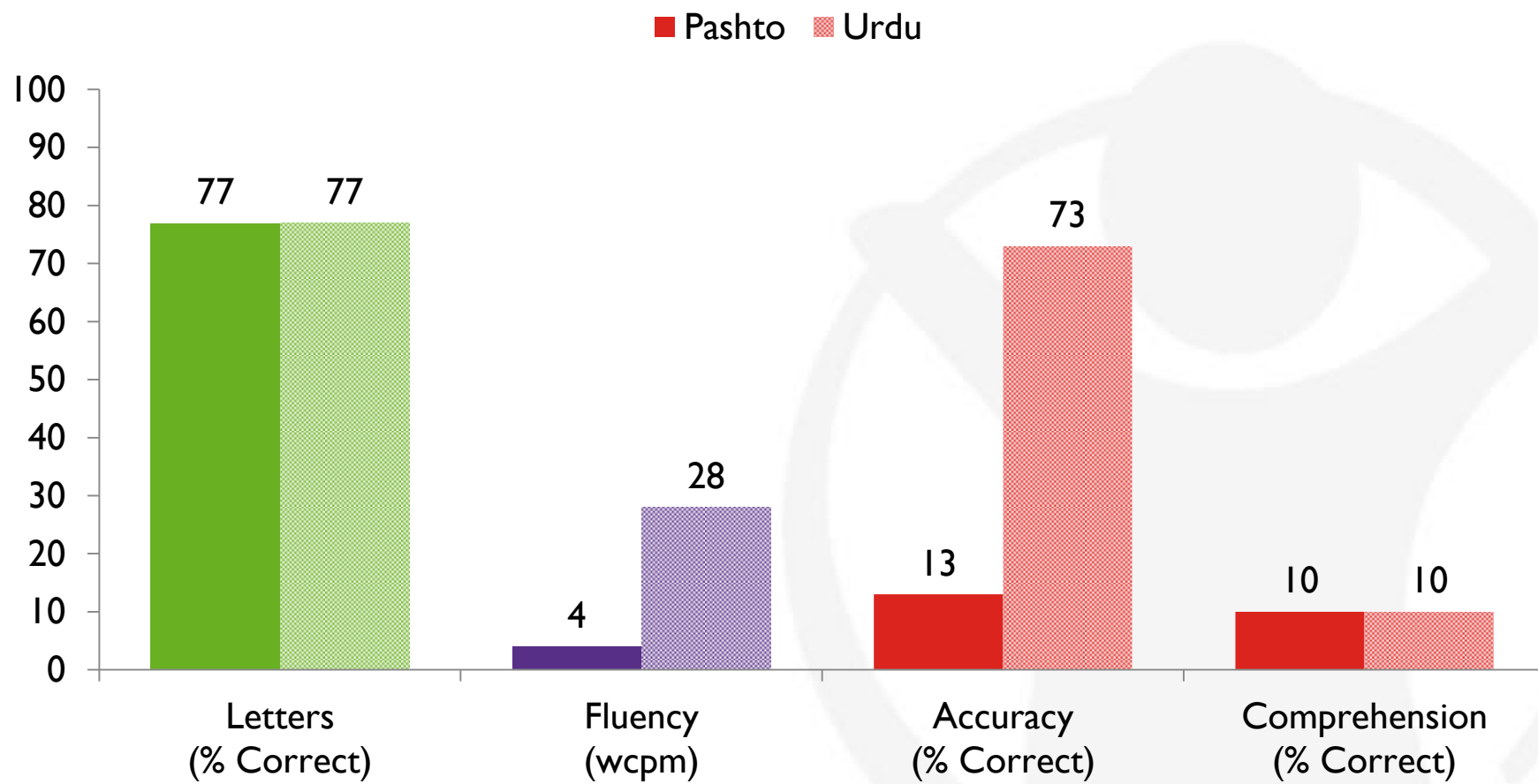
# Bangladesh: L1 and L2 skill profile



# Guatemala: L1 and L2 skill profile



# Pakistan: L1 and L2 skill profile



# Does the evidence fit the expected pattern?

## Skills Profile shows

### L1 -> L2 pattern

- Malawi
- South Africa
- Zimbabwe
- Bangladesh

## Skills Profile doesn't show

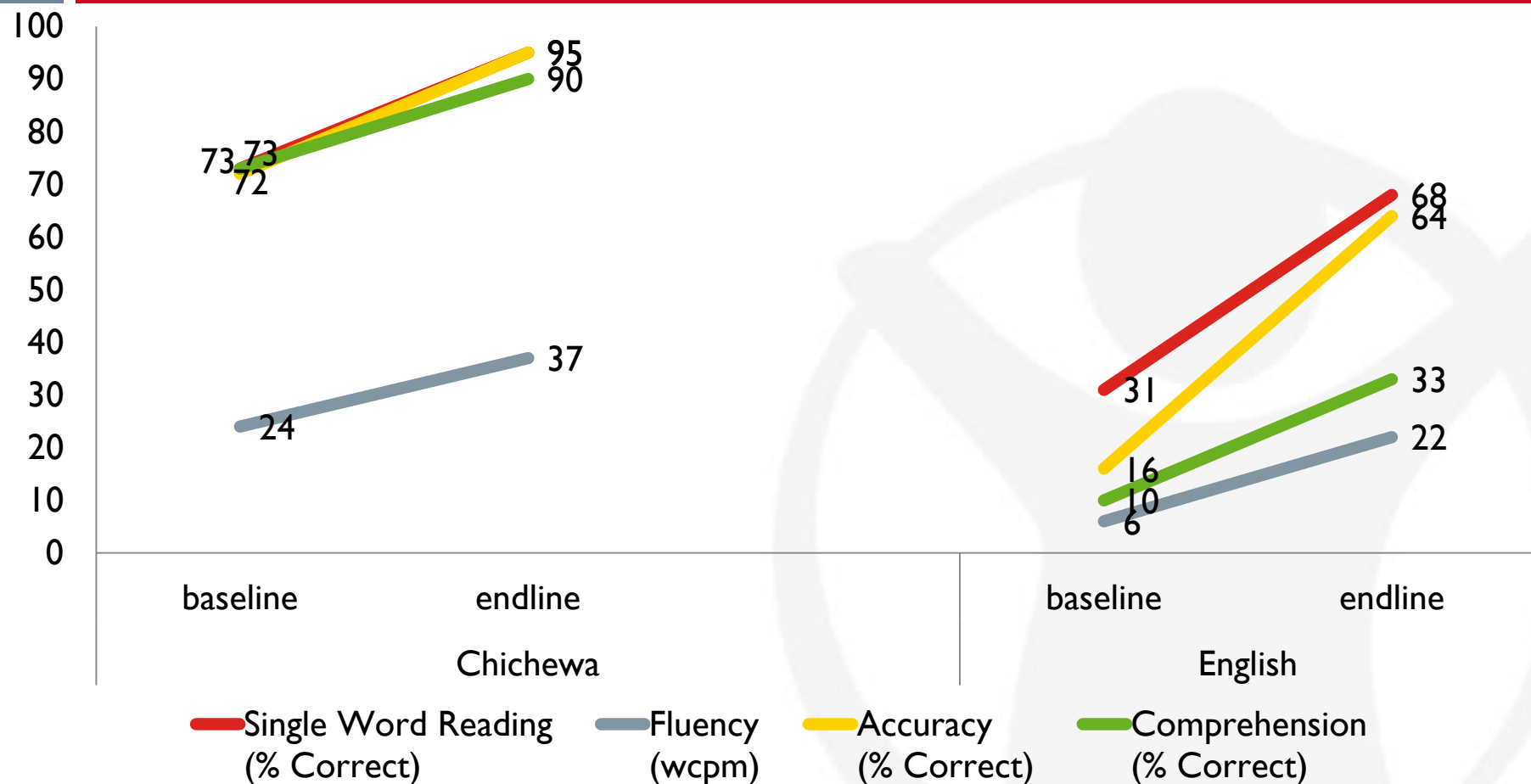
### L1 -> L2 pattern

- Philippines
- Guatemala
- Pakistan

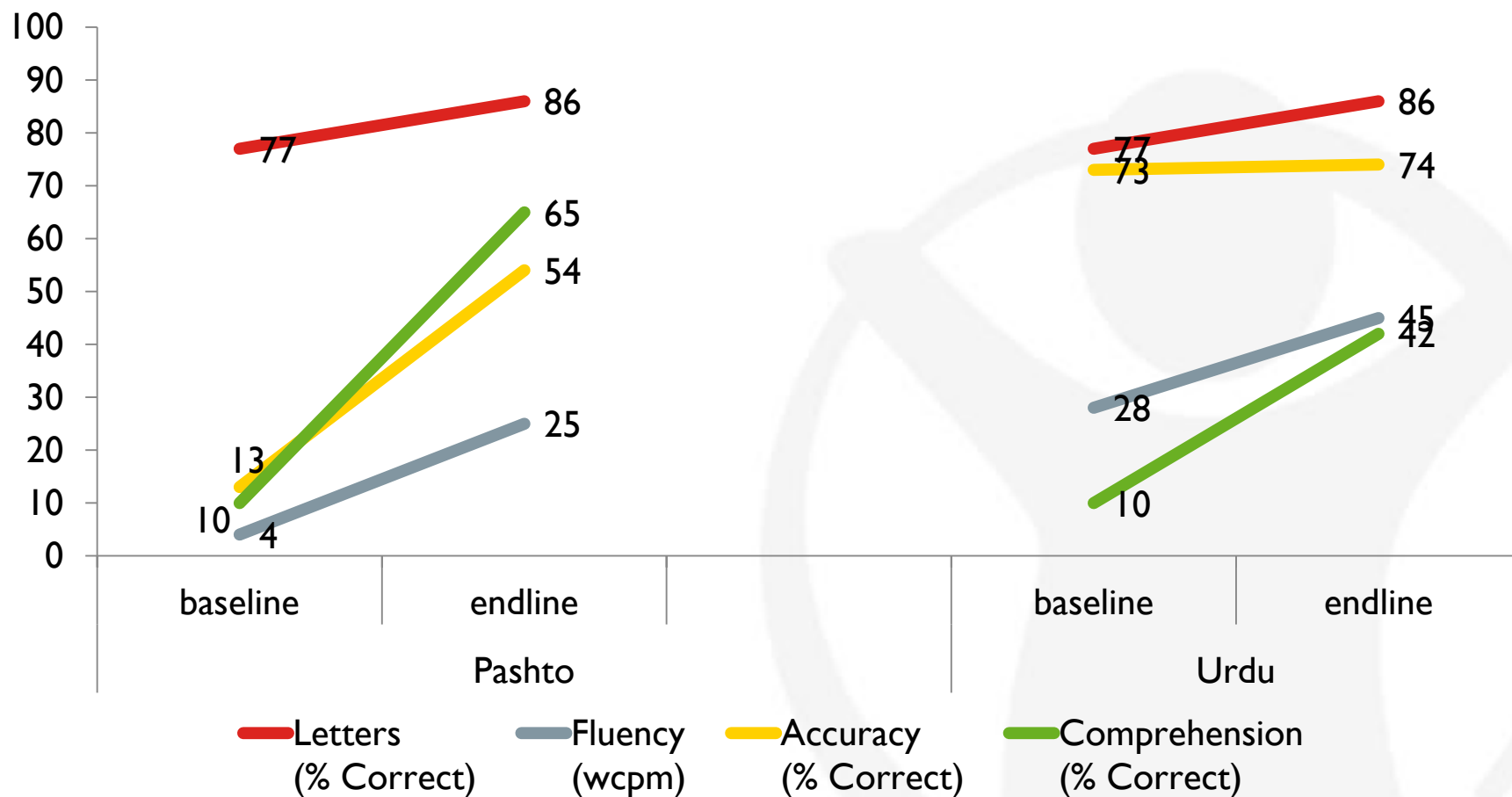
# Research Questions at Time 2

1. Across a year, is growth similar L1 and L2?
2. Language interdependence literature suggests that reading skills in L1 link to the same or higher order skills in L2: does L1 status predict L2 growth?

# Malawi: skills growth in Chichewa and English

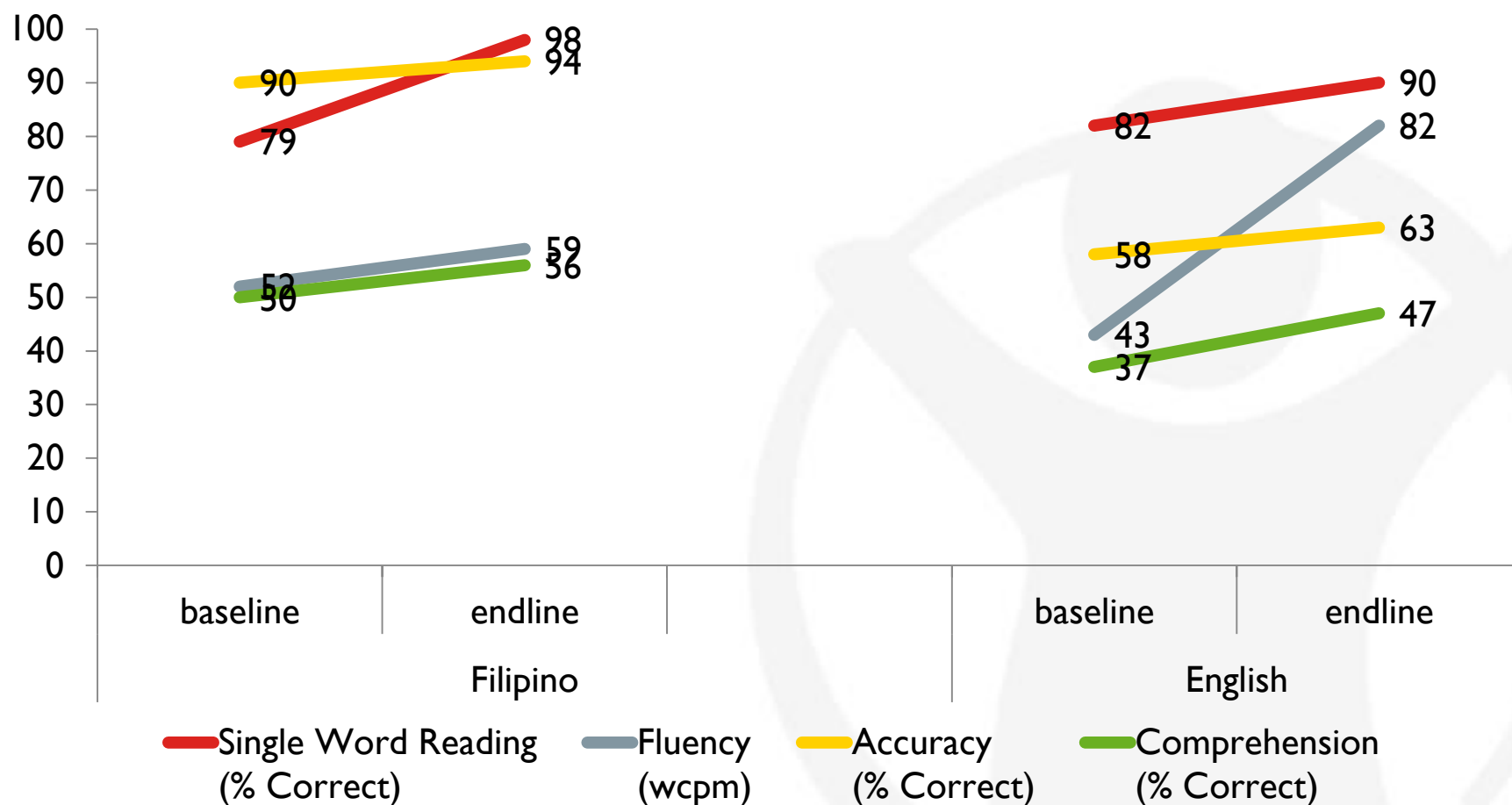


# Pakistan: skills growth in Pashto and Urdu

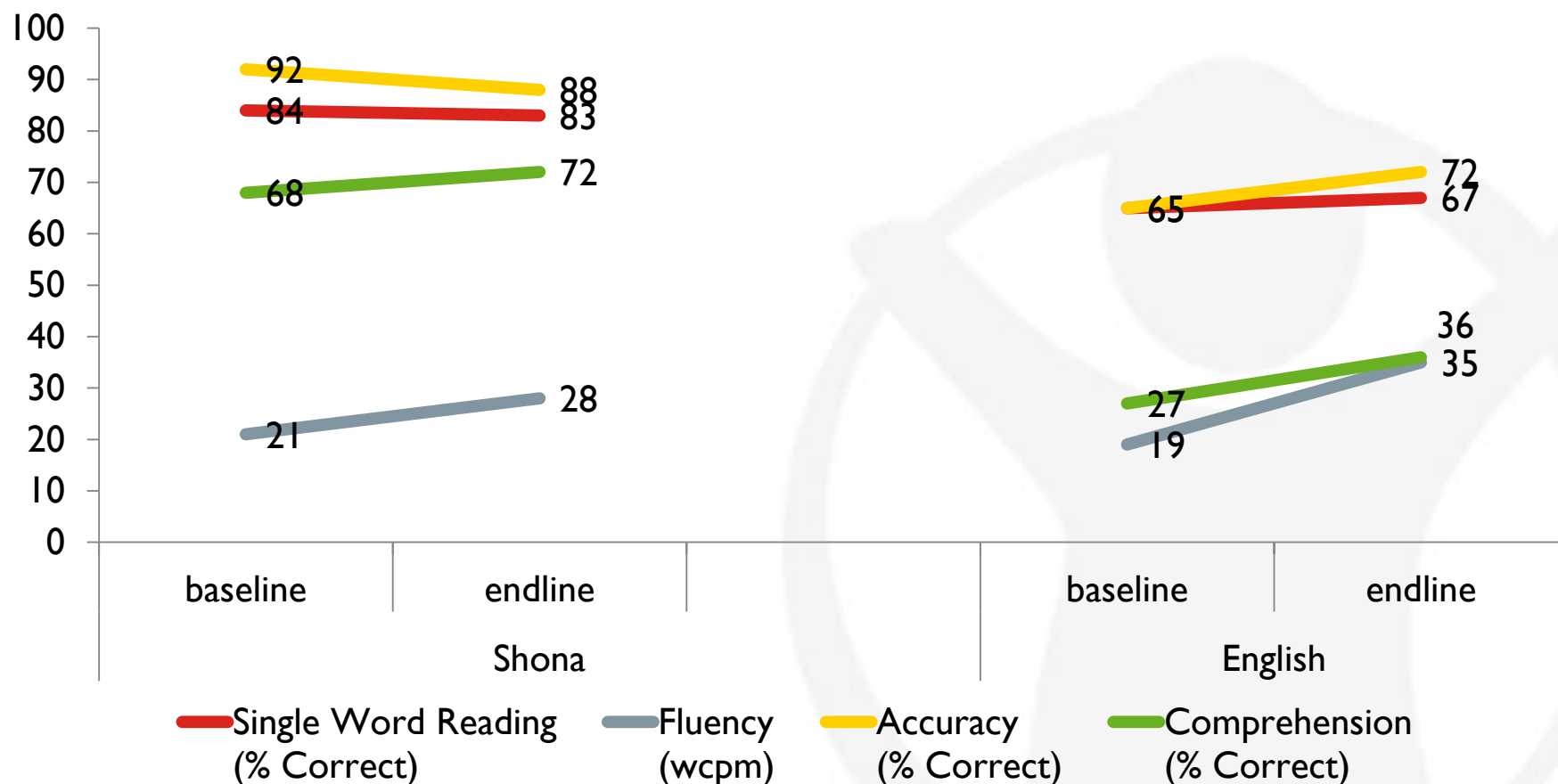




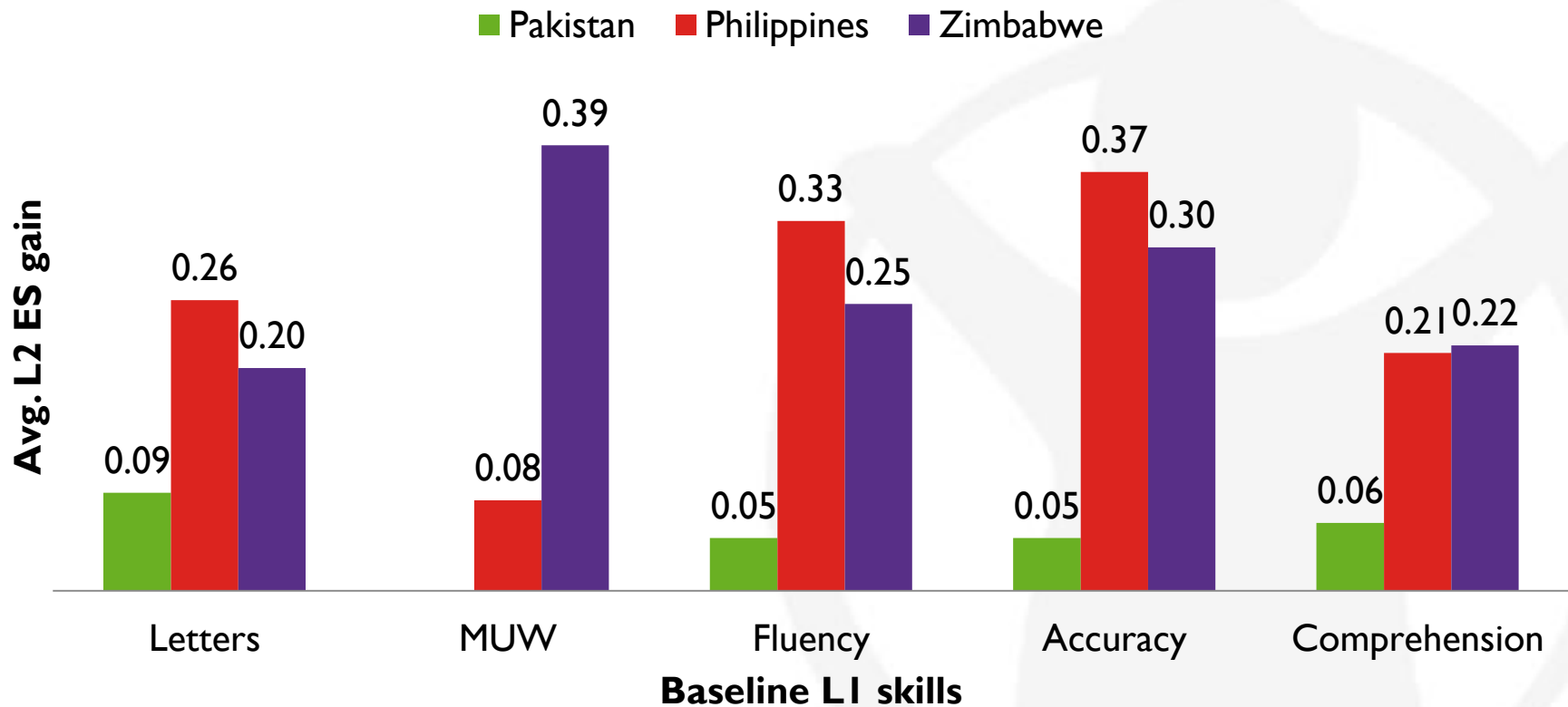
# Philippines: skills growth in Filipino and English



# Zimbabwe: skills growth in Shona and English



# LI baseline skills predict higher order L2 skill gains



# Conclusions and questions

- ❑ It is not clear which hypothesis is any more or less strongly borne out in these skill profiles and pictures of growth.
- ❑ Context seems capable of messing with the assumed primacy of L1 in the directionality of L1->L2 transfer.
- ❑ How much transfer is expected or good?
- ❑ How would you design a study to test language learning interdependence?



[www.savethechildren.org](http://www.savethechildren.org)

**THANK YOU!**

[ADOWD@SAVECHILDREN.ORG](mailto:ADOWD@SAVECHILDREN.ORG)